To: R8 Tap[R8_Tap@epa.gov]
From: Hammer, Diana
Sent: Wed 10/26/2016 2:58:01 PM
Subject: FW: High Country News: The bid for Bears Ears

FYI.

- Diana

Diana Hammer

(406) 457-5040

From: Frank [mailto:homebythehills@comcast.net]
Sent: Tuesday, October 18, 2016 5:12 PM
To: homebythehills <homebythehills@comcast.net>
Subject: High Country News: The bid for Bears Ears

http://www.hcn.org/articles/the-bid-for-bears-ears-national-monument

Public Lands

The bid for Bears Ears

The tribal push for a Bears Ears monument raises thorny questions of homeland and sovereignty.

Jonathan Thompson

Image credit: Josh Ewing/Courtesy Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition

Oct. 16, 2016 Web Exclusive

Spider Grandmother spoke. She said, "Remember the sipapuni, for you will not see it again. You will go on long migrations. Wherever you stop to rest, leave your marks on the rocks and cliffs so that others will know who was there before them. … The stars, the sun, the clouds and fires in the night will show you which directions to take. In time you will find the land that is meant for you."

—From *The Fourth World of the Hopis*
by Harold Courlander

It's already hot on a mid-July morning as I tuck into a plate of "Eggs Manuelito" and sip coffee at the Twin Rocks Cafe on the edge of the little town of Bluff, an untidy smattering of stately stone homes, gnarled old cottonwood trees and dust alongside the San Juan River in southeastern Utah. Normally, canyon country in July feels a bit like Babel, overrun by hordes of European tourists enamored of red rock, sage and big skies, but the depressed euro has thinned the herds significantly.

Bluff, population 400, is anything but quiet, however. Cars, including a silver sedan with #RuralLivesMatter soaped on the window, haphazardly line the dirt streets around the town's little community center. Alongside a dusty, weed-choked ballpark is a row of shiny black SUVs with government plates. On the other side, hand-drawn signs jut from a chain-link fence like corn from a dryland field: "National Monument, Dooda, Dooda," reads a yellow one, repeating the Navajo word for "no." "PROTECT," proclaims another, above a drawing of a bear's head.

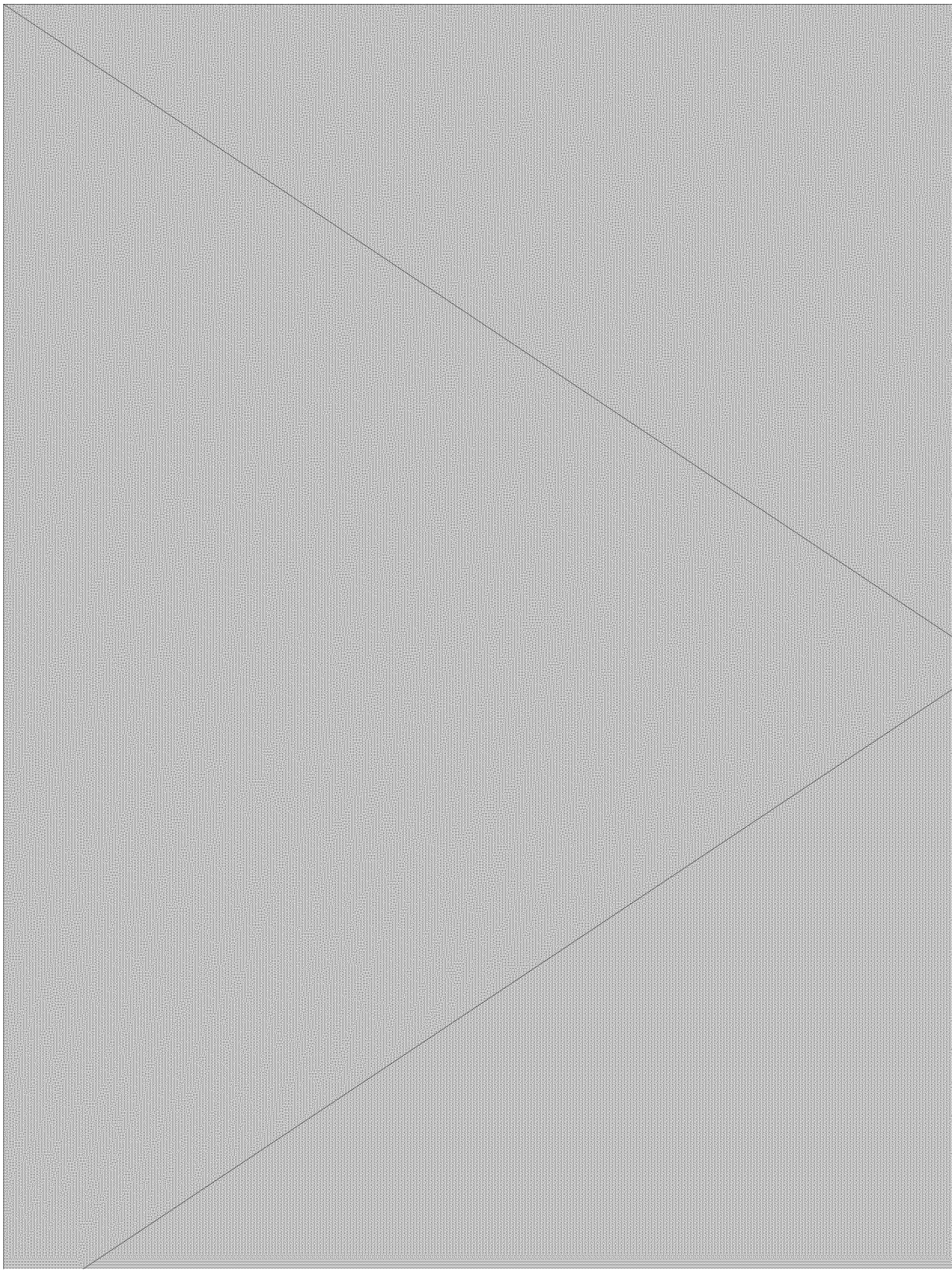
Over the next few hours, more than 1,000 folks trickle into the center's grounds to give Interior Secretary Sally Jewell a piece of their minds. She's here to gauge sentiment regarding five regional tribes' proposal for a Bears Ears National Monument on 1.9 million acres of nearby federal land. As participants arrive, they're offered color-coded T-shirts: Baby blue for monument supporters, brown for opponents. It's a visual cue that demonstrates how the "Native Americans and environmentalists vs. white Mormon land-use militants" trope falls apart here. Local Utes and Navajos, as often as not, wear brown shirts, and many are also devout members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In the hours before the hearing starts, folks congregate in whatever shade they can find and converse, sometimes spiritedly. A brown-shirted young Navajo woman, with a baby on her hip, confronts a group of baffled teen-aged blue-shirts, and outlines the reasons so-called traditional, on-reservation Navajos aren't fit to manage any more land. One

Navajo man says that a monument is the best way to keep the oil companies from ravaging the mesas and canyons that the tribe holds sacred; another warns that a monument will lock Navajos out of those same areas.

It is difficult to untangle all the threads of the debate, which has been raging in various forms for years here, and is reaching its climax now, during President Barack Obama's final months in office. But listen for a while, and an underlying, constant theme is revealed: The notion of home, and who should have control over it when it happens to overlap public land.

"This is my home," Brooke Lyman tells Jewell. "We aren't vacationing here. San Juan County is America to me. For you to come in and make a monument and take our freedoms, it's like taking America from me." Brooke is the daughter of Phil Lyman, the local county commissioner best known for protesting "federal overreach" by leading ATV-riding protesters into the archaeologically rich Recapture Canyon a couple of years back. They, along with most other monument opponents, hold to the Sagebrush Rebel ideology of local autonomy, the belief that San Juan County residents — not environmentalists from Salt Lake City, not bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., not backpackers who trek through the canyons once a year — are the best stewards of this place. "Outsiders," including Native Americans, shouldn't be allowed to determine the land's fate, which is why, when Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye, wearing a suit in spite of the heat, tells Jewell that his people relate to the Bears Ears like an Anglo does to a family member, monument opponents respond with boos, and chant, "Go home!"



Suzette Morris, spokeswoman for the White Mesa Utes opposed to the Bears Ears National Monument, outside the hearing last July in Bluff, Utah. “We’re Native Americans. We’re supposed to be one with the land. Protection should come from within ourselves.”

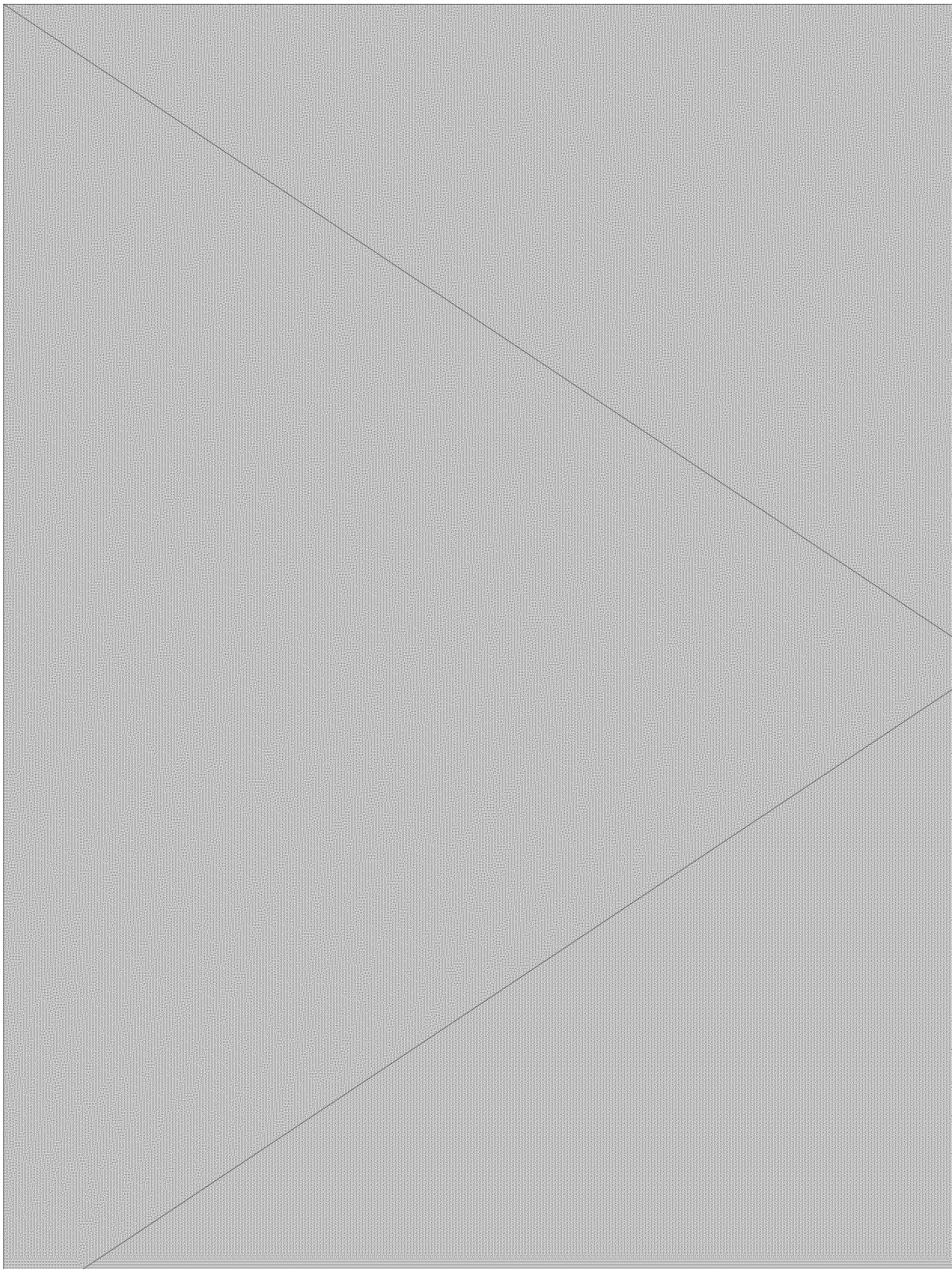
Jonathan Thompson

The proposed monument does not include any tribal lands, yet if anyone is home here, it’s Begaye, whose ancestors sought refuge near the Bears Ears during the 1860s, when U.S. troops killed, brutalized and enslaved Navajos before exiling them from their homeland. The Zuni, Hopi and other Pueblo leaders here to lend support to the monument are also home.

Their ancestors built the Bluff Great House, just a stone’s throw from the hearing venue, back in the 11th century, and their religions and cultures were shaped by this ground.

And just like the Sagebrush Rebels, they want the freedom to be stewards of their homeland, and to have some say over how that land is administered, protected and interpreted to the public. A Bears Ears monument, as proposed, would give them that freedom, by giving tribal representatives a majority voice on a management committee, which also includes federal land managers but notably not any county or state officials. And so the Bears Ears battle at its core comes down to one type of local control versus another, of the Sagebrush Rebellion against an Indigenous uprising to gain sovereignty over ancestral homelands.

“It’s been far too long that us Natives have not been at the table,” says Malcolm Lehi, a Ute Mountain Ute council representative from the White Mesa community in San Juan County, at the Bluff hearing. “Here we are today inviting ourselves to the table. We’re making history.”



Inside the hearing, where Interior Secretary Sally Jewell heard comments on both sides of the issue from both Anglos and Native Americans.

Jonathan Thompson

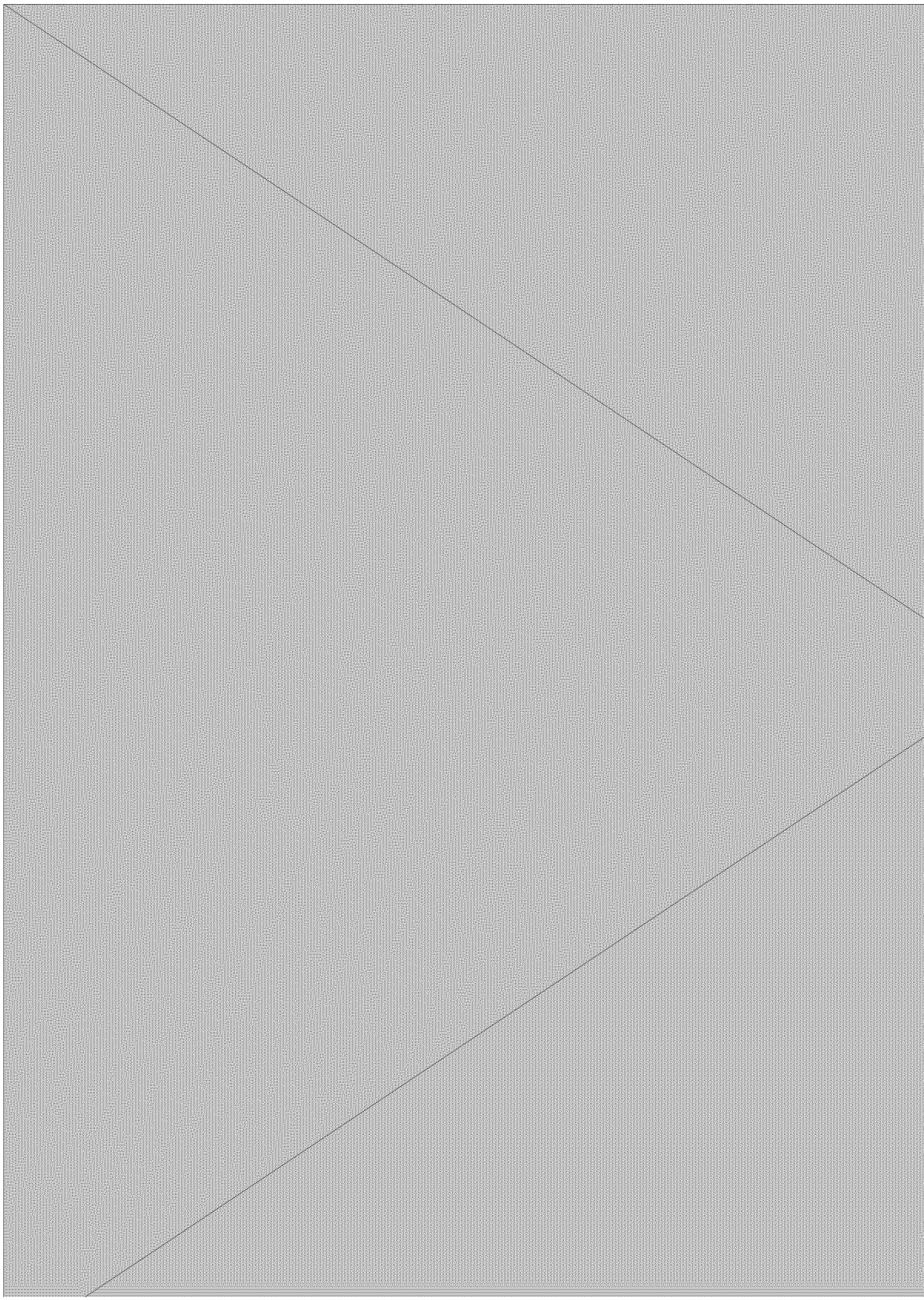
A couple of weeks after the Bluff hearing, I'm going as fast as my 27-year-old car will take me along Highway 264 east of Tuba City, Arizona. The alternately soft and staccato Navajo language emanates from my speakers — a DJ reading the morning rodeo report for KTNN, "The Voice of the Navajo Nation." An old country ballad comes on next — maybe Tammy or Loretta — crooning in that scratchy and sad and distant AM tone, the perfect soundtrack for the landscape floating by: A treeless plateau and endless sky, the San Francisco Peaks in the distance.

I'm in the middle of a weeks-long exploration of the notion of home, which has taken me from Hovenweep to Cedar Mesa to Tsegi Canyon and now to the mesa-top villages of Hopi to try to understand what it means to be truly *of* a place. I know I'm getting close to my next stop when I see the first shock of emerald green rising from the scrub, a corn tassel blowing in the soft breeze in a Hopi field, thriving despite the lack of rain or irrigation.

Tribal offices are all closed for Pueblo Revolt Day — which commemorates the August 1680 uprising of the Indigenous Pueblo people against Spanish colonizers — so I meet Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, Hopi's cultural preservation officer for the last 27 years, at his small home in Hotevilla. When I tell him that I camped the previous night at Navajo National Monument, he bristles. "You mean *Hopi* National Monument," he scolds, a reminder of the lingering tension that exists between the two tribes. The dwellings at the monument, Kawestima to the Hopi, were built not by Navajos, but by ancestors of the Hopi, as is true of many of the thousands of pueblos that lie in and around the proposed Bears Ears National Monument.

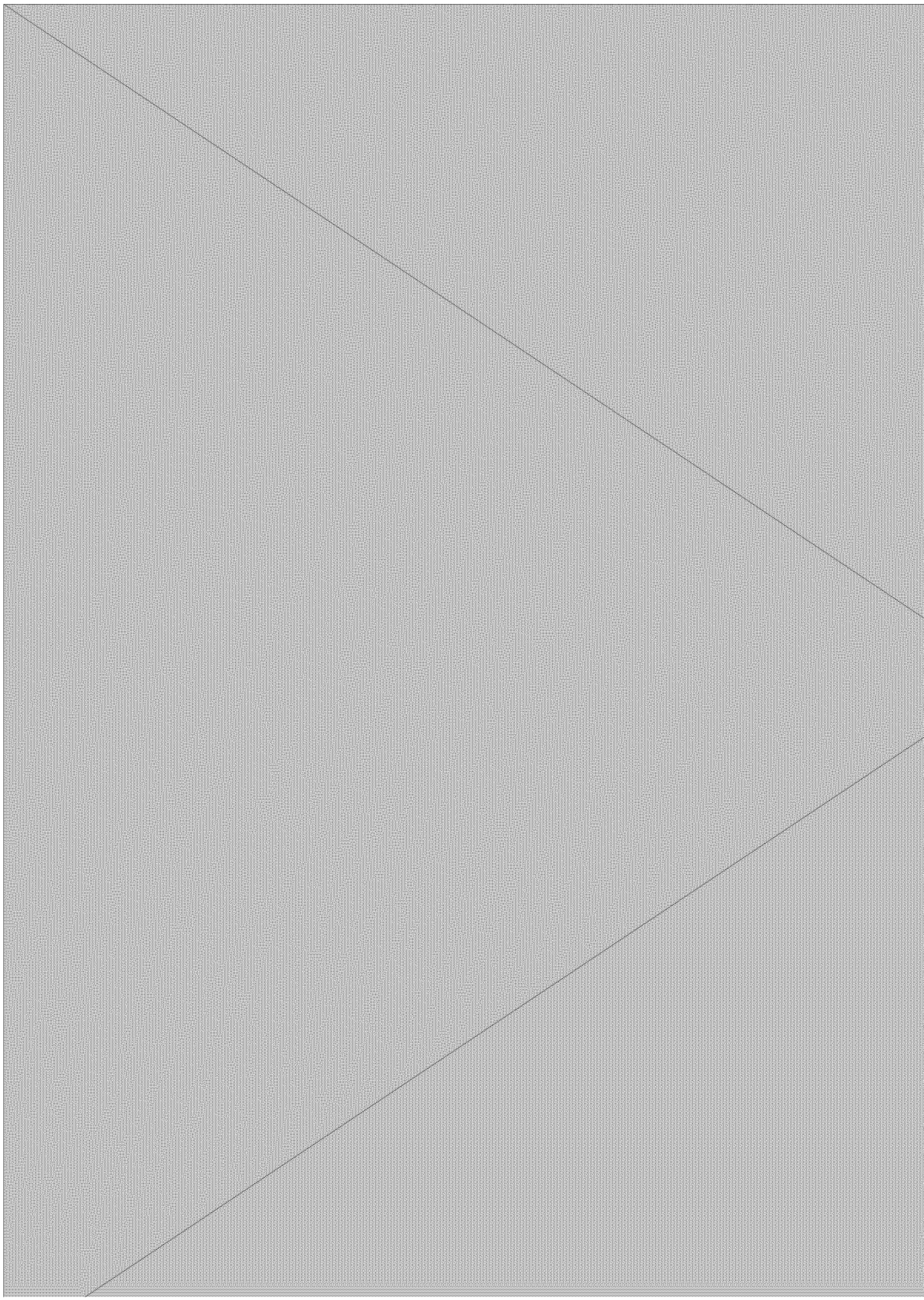
When Kuwanwisiwma visits these sites, the first thing he looks for is rock art, where, he says, "I can see contemporary lifeways and see connections, I can see the stories of the clan ceremonies." Take a particular concentric circle rock art with lines of figures seeming to emerge from it carved into the vast stone wave now known as Comb Ridge. It's a map, says Kuwanwisiwma, of clan migrations that unfolded over hundreds of years.

•

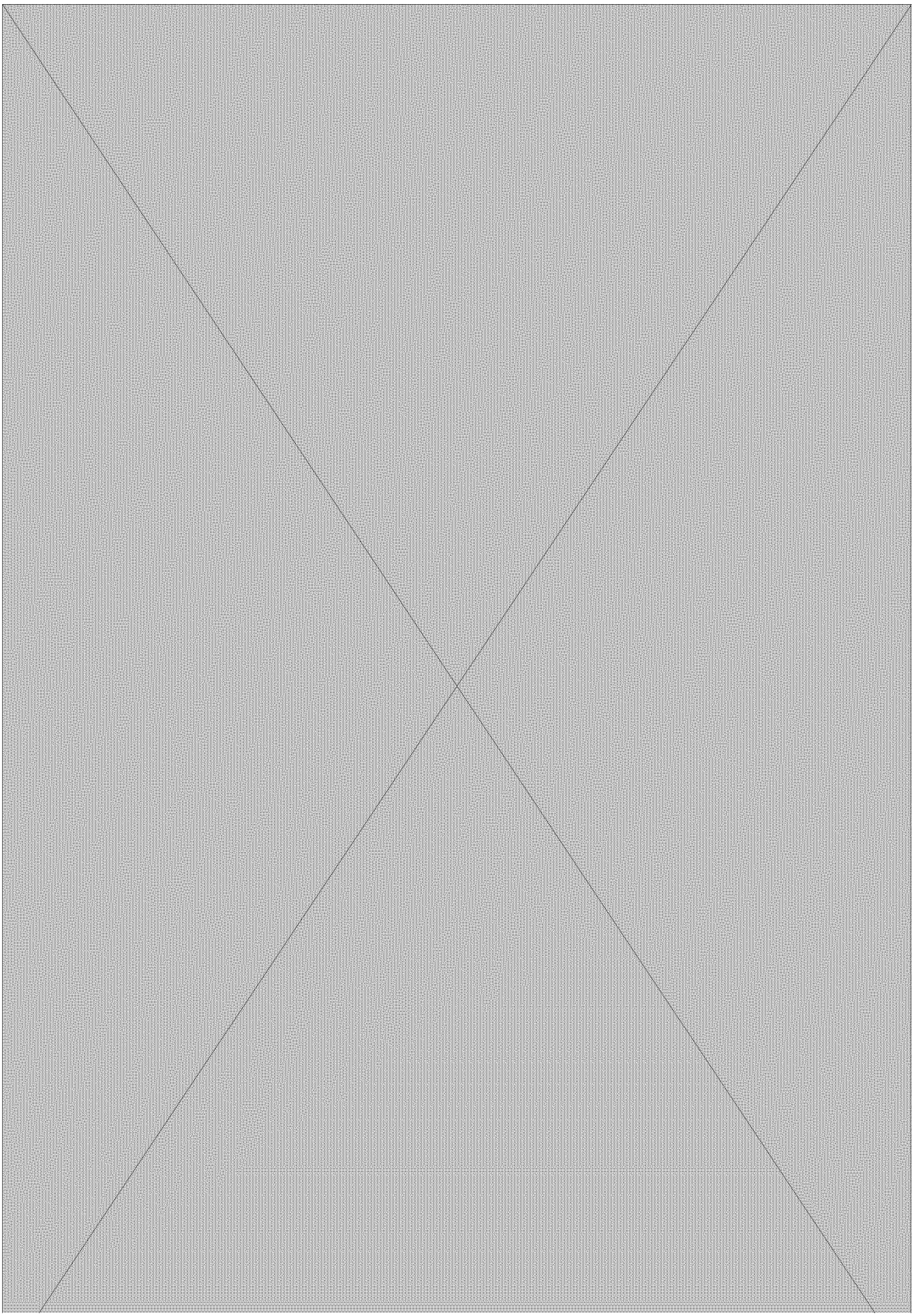


Bears Ears buttes, at the heart of the proposed Bears Ears National Monument in southern Utah, a sacred place for tribes.

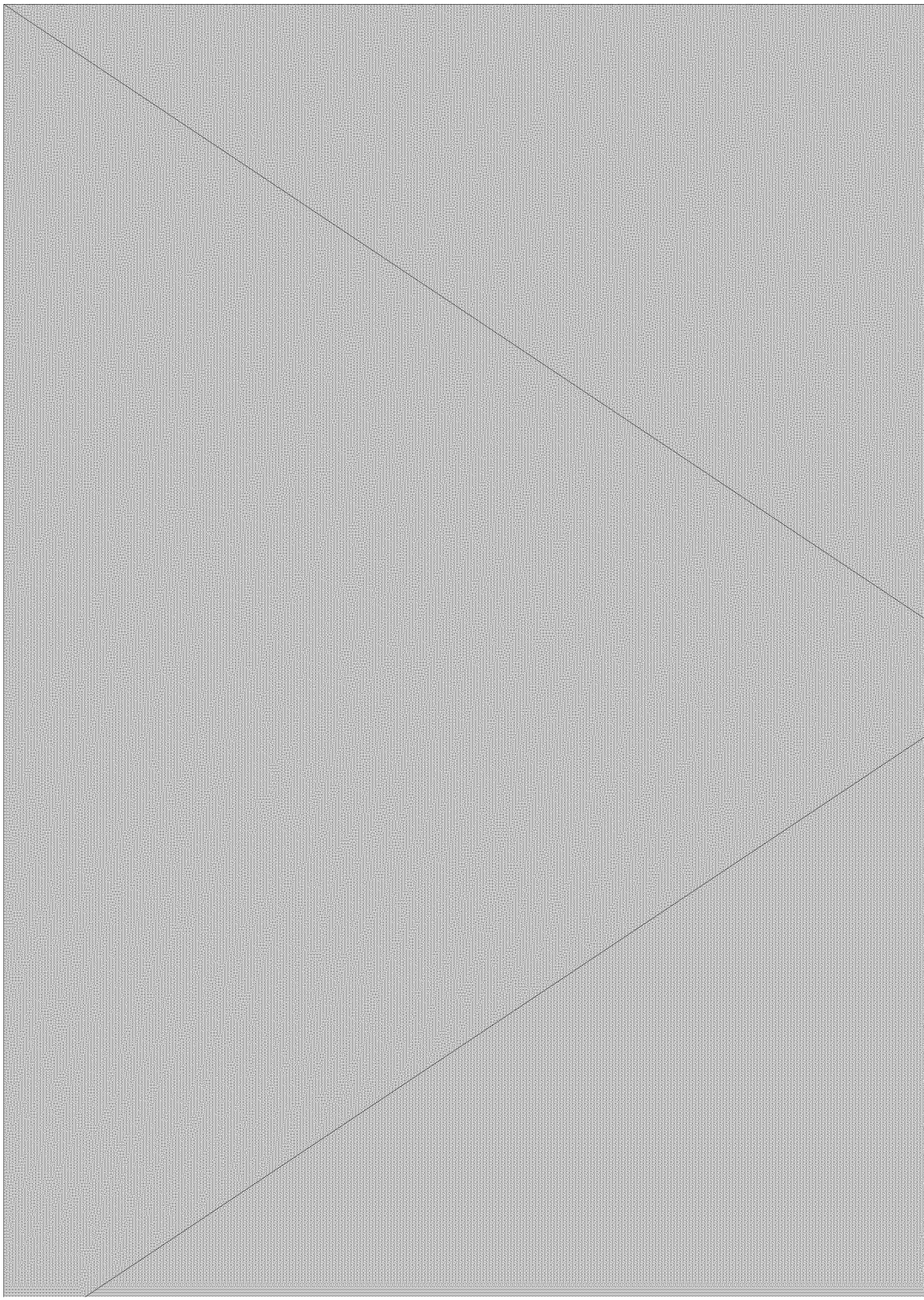
Tim Peterson



•



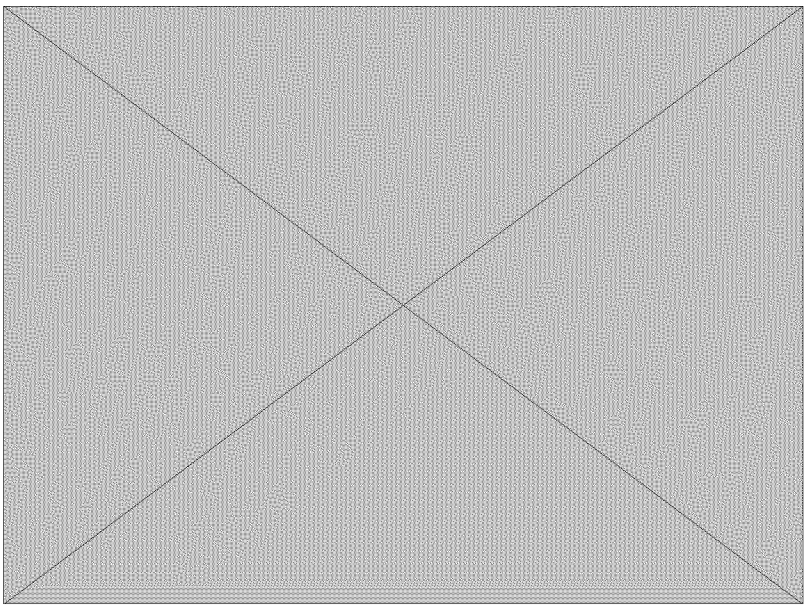
•



1 2 3 4 View Gallery

The people emerged from the sipapuni, represented by the circle's center, from the Third World into the current one, or the Fourth World. The deities then commanded the people to "place their footprints," or migrate, in the four cardinal directions, each circle symbolizing a stopping point along the way. After settling in a place — the Bears Ears, Mesa Verde, Hovenweep — for decades or even centuries, the clan would move on to the next circle on its chosen path. All of the Southwestern pueblos have similar migration traditions. Though they vary, they all include specific references to the San Juan River Basin in what is now Utah and Colorado. "When you learn about history and clan migration, you see how vibrant that area (Bears Ears) was with Hopi clans," Kuwanwisiwma says.

One thousand years ago, clusters of pueblos teeming with activity dotted what are now the piñon, juniper and sage forests atop Cedar Mesa. Men tended to hundreds of acres of electric-green fronds of corn, beans and squash. Women ground corn and shelled beans on rooftops, while turkeys gobbled in nearby pens and domesticated dogs roamed village plazas. Groups of runners followed wide, carefully constructed "roads" from here to Chaco, perhaps the political and cultural center of the Pueblo world. Near the solstice, Kachinas emerged from canyons, danced slowly across plazas and descended into great kivas to summon the sun or the rain.

- 

In praise of a wild West

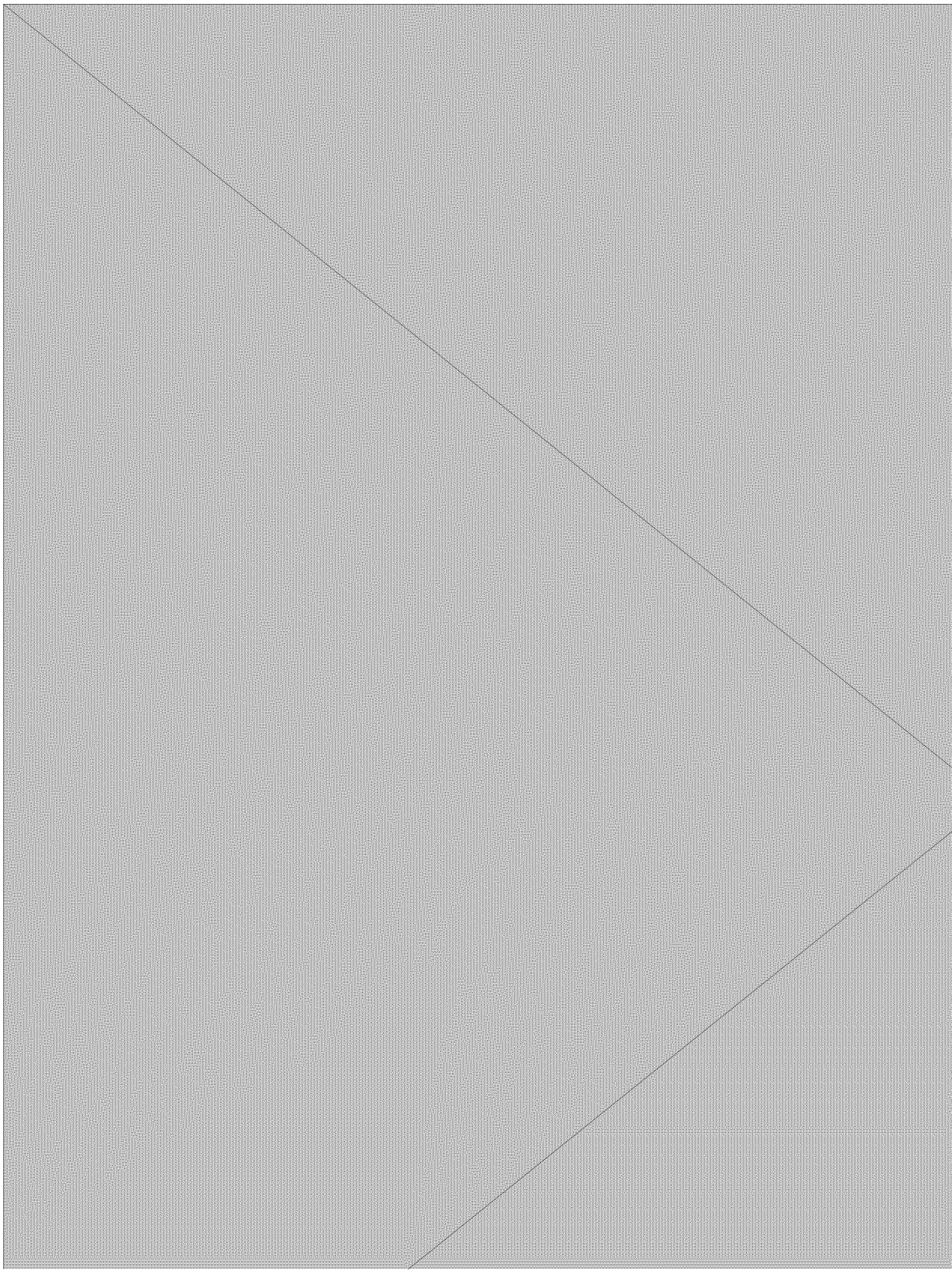
Read more

“They (the Zuni) lived there for a very long time. We don’t know how long … but our oral history is very clear that our people were there. And our oral history can be affirmed,” says Jim Enote, director of the Colorado Plateau Foundation and a Zuni tribal member, whom I meet with in his office at the A:shiwi A:wan Museum in Zuni the day after my Hopi visit. “When we visit museums at Mesa Verde or Chaco and see the artifacts, we can clearly identify which are Zuni because we still make them that way today. It’s affirmed when we visit places like the Bears Ears. We see things that are familiar, that help us connect the dots.”

Near the end of the 12th century, after the Ancestral Puebloans had built and lived in villages in the region for more than 800 years, shaping religion, culture and societies, trouble arrived. Someone or something threatened the people, pushing them to cluster into bigger, more easily defended pueblos. And by the middle of the 13th century, the Puebloan communities of the Bears Ears region were empty. After a journey every bit as epic as that of the Israelites, the people had moved on to place their footprints elsewhere, ultimately fulfilling the covenant and settling in their respective homelands, today’s Hopi, Zuni and Eastern pueblos. “We have earned the right to be earth stewards,” says Kuwanwisiwma. “That’s why emotions run deep on these issues, and why we’re trying to get the Bears Ears monument enacted.”

Enote, a warm man who smiles often and measures his words carefully, is especially emphatic about one point: The ancestral homelands were never abandoned. “Many of these places were consecrated as homes, or as shrines, just as we consecrate our homes and shrines today,” says Enote, his voice intense. “They are not ruins. They are not abandoned. Once consecrated, they are consecrated in perpetuity. … They are holy

forever.”

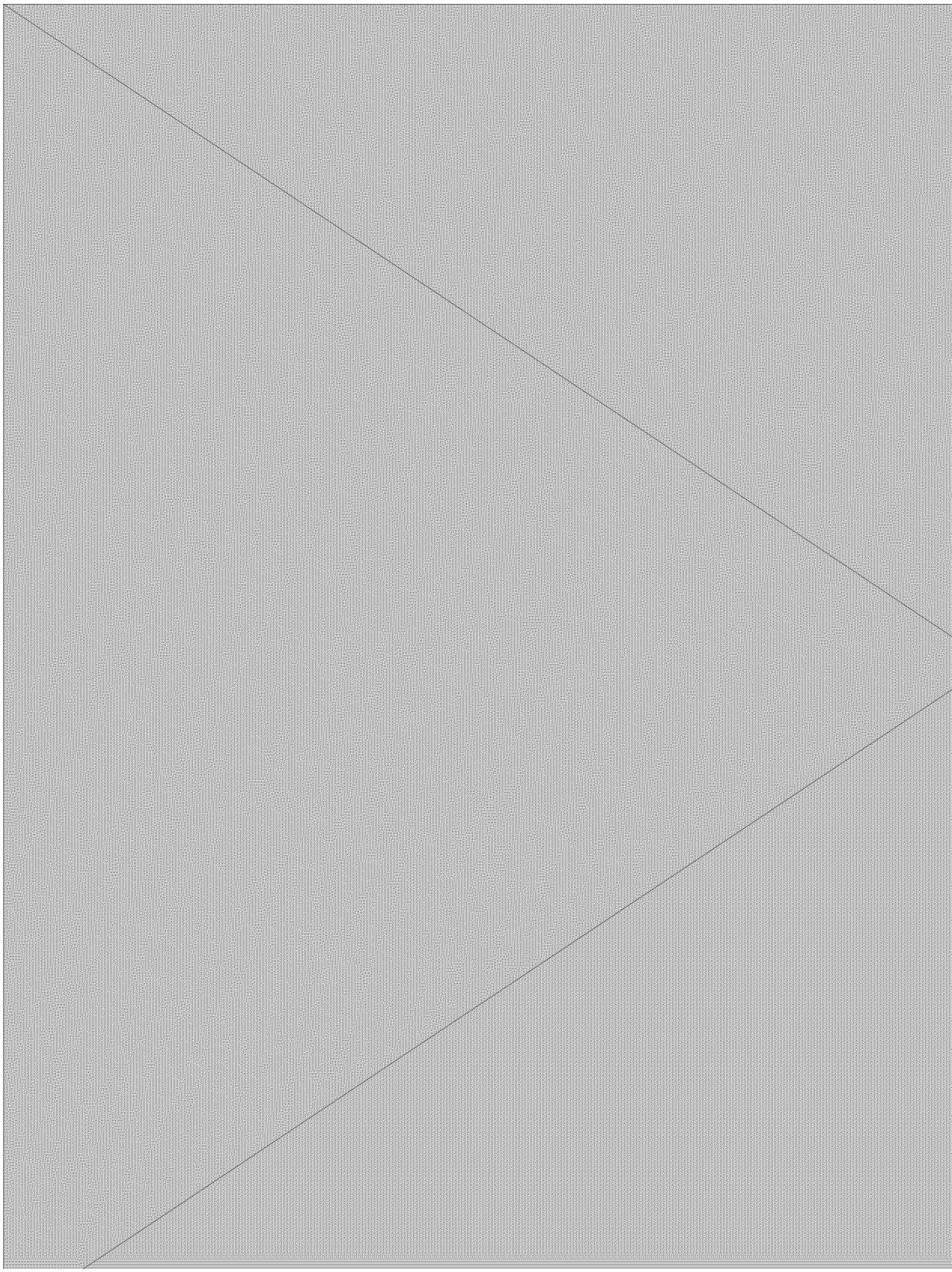


On Christmas Day of 1879, four scouts from the Hole-in-the-Rock expedition climbed to the top of a pyramid-shaped toe of Elk Ridge, saw the Abajo Mountains and realized they and their 250 companions would not die out in the frigid desert after all. Their journey had been an arduous one, so much so that they simply stopped and gave up 18 miles short of their goal, Montezuma Creek, and established Bluff City at the verdant confluence of Cottonwood Wash and the San Juan River, instead.

This ragtag crew had been sent, many of them unwillingly, by the Mormon Church to plant themselves here — not to make the desert bloom, but to buffer the prosperous settlements of "Dixie" to the west from the potentially hostile Utes and Navajos, who had migrated into the region hundreds of years earlier and had made it their home. And they were to hold at bay the hardrock miners who were flocking to the mountains of southwestern Colorado, bringing greed and whiskey and Gentile ways. The intrepid pioneers often felt as if they'd been forsaken: Ravaged at times by drought and floods, they tangled with Native Americans, competed with Colorado and Texas cattleman for sparse cattle range, and absorbed an influx of prospectors looking for "flour gold" in the San Juan. They even fended off a bid by the Indian Rights Association in the 1890s to turn the entire county into a reservation.

It's no wonder, then, that, having scraped a home out of what one explorer, in 1859, deemed the most "worthless and impractical" country around, they became convinced that they were entitled to the federal lands that blanket much of their county. It was their birthright to graze tens of thousands of cattle there, to blade hundreds of miles of roads, drill for oil, burrow into mesas in search of federally subsidized uranium and, perhaps most of all, collect the remains of the Puebloan civilization by the truckload to decorate their mantels or sell to collectors or merchants.

Winston Hurst was born in Blanding just as that mentality was approaching its zenith. Like other local kids, he loved to roam the wild lands around town, scratching around in old sites and gathering the potsherds and arrowheads that seemed to litter the ground everywhere he looked. But he went off to Brigham Young University, where he studied archaeology, and had his eyes opened to the difference between looting a site and ethically surveying or excavating it. When he came back, he joined a growing nationwide movement to preserve the natural and cultural wonders of the land.



In a deeply polarized world, Blanding, Utah, archaeologist Winston Hurst has found himself "in a kind of quiet place in the middle" when it comes to the monument proposal. "Whatever needs to be done to preserve that needs to be done. We can win battle after battle, but in this county it needs to be done organically, or we've lost the war."

JT Thomas

"We worked our butts off, in the '60s, '70s and '80s, to achieve balance in the way the land was managed," says Hurst, who has become one of the foremost experts on southeastern Utah archaeology, as well as an ardent advocate of archaeological preservation. Congress passed the Wilderness Act in 1964, and it was closely followed by a string of landmark environmental laws. But the one that hit home hardest here in San Juan County, perhaps, was the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. It altered the mission of the Bureau of Land Management, which administers 41 percent of this New Jersey-sized county's land, from one of maximizing extraction to encouraging multiple use. It also rescinded the 1866 statute that allowed rampant roadbuilding across federal lands, and included a mandate for the BLM to inventory all wilderness-quality lands under its purview.

It was, in other words, a direct challenge to the wring-the-earth-out mindset. San Juan County lashed back, led by Cal Black, a local uranium miner, businessman, politician, lover of roads — and the model for the character of Bishop Love, who pursues the motley crew of Edward Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang* as they sabotage bulldozers, incinerate bridges and otherwise attempt to stifle development in San Juan County. In reaction to what he called federal colonialism, Black helped launch the first Sagebrush Rebellion of the modern era, joining Republicans Sens. Orrin Hatch and Barry Goldwater to create the League for the Advancement of States Rights to pass bills transferring federal land to states and counties, the predecessor of today's American Land Council. He threatened to blow up ruins and vandalize BLM property, and aggressively tried to lure a nuclear waste dump to his county.

After Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, the Westwide rebellion subsided. But to Black and those who shared his views, the battle was just getting started. The (Southern) Utah Wilderness Alliance was formed in 1985, and in 1989 it put out a citizen's proposal that would ultimately become the Red Rock Wilderness Act, a far-reaching bill that, if ever passed, would put the highest level of protection on millions of acres of BLM land in Utah, including much of the now-proposed Bears Ears National Monument. Utah's Sagebrush Rebels saw it as the ultimate threat — a sort of environmentalists' nuclear bomb.

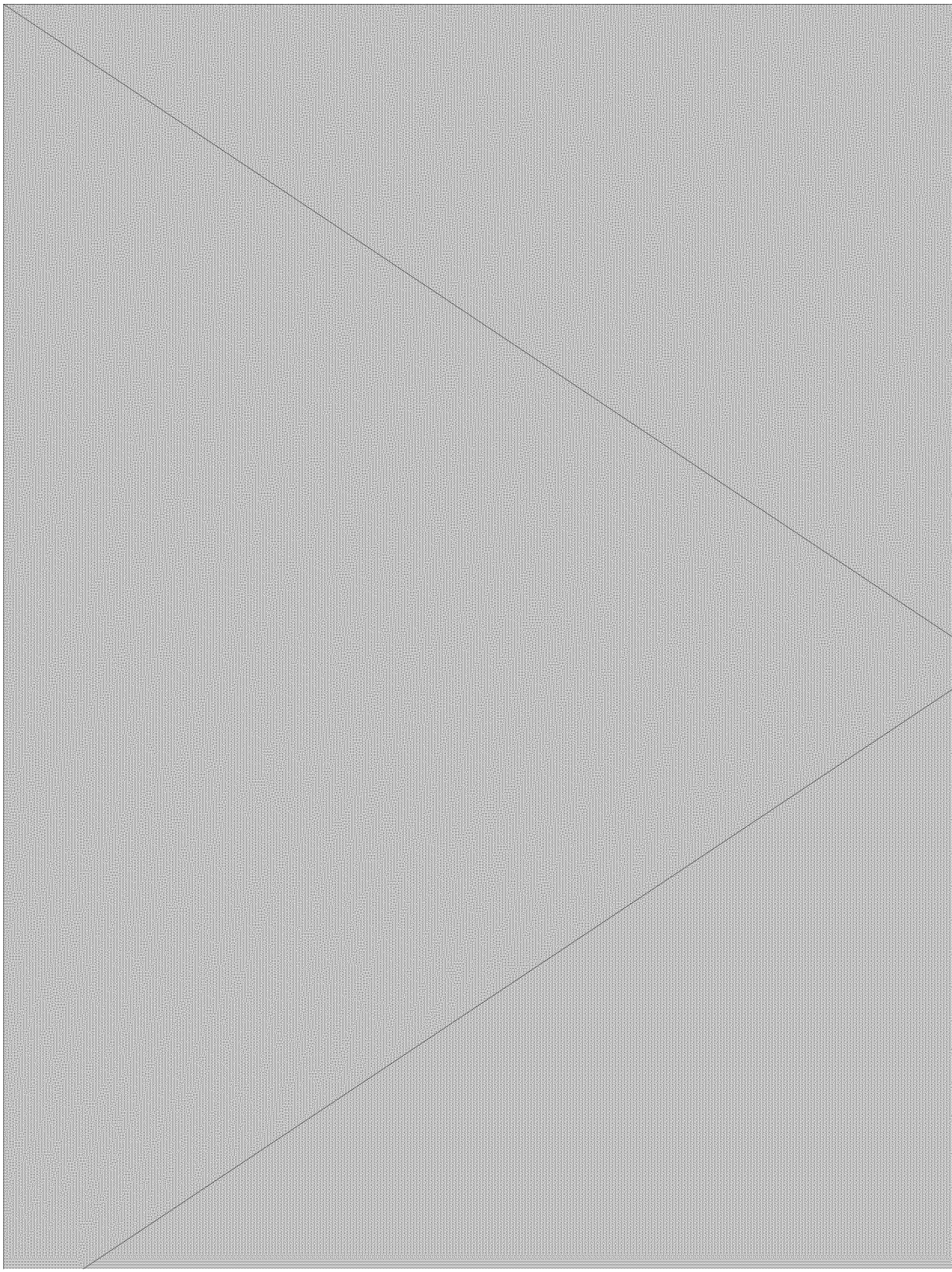
At the time, the uranium and oil industries were being battered by global markets, and the feds were cracking down on San Juan County for grossly violating the voting rights of Native Americans, who make up about half the population. In 1986, dozens of federal agents descended on Blanding, raiding the homes of suspected pothunters. Black denounced their tactics as "gestapo-like." Black died in 1990, but others — county commissioners and sheriffs — took hold of the Sagebrush baton and ran with it.

Meanwhile, SUWA and its allies, while never giving up on wholesale wilderness designation, continued their surgical strikes. In 2007, the BLM closed part of Recapture Canyon to motorized vehicles after a trail was constructed without a permit there. In 2009, federal agents reprised the 1986 pot-hunting raid.

A few months later, the Red Rock Wilderness Act got its first-ever hearing in Congress, showing that it might have some legs after all. And a "secret" list of places under consideration for national monument designation surfaced, with Cedar Mesa included — an apparent redux of the surreptitious 1996 designation by then-President Bill Clinton of the vast Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument just west of here. That it was Obama potentially wielding the Antiquities Act elicited an especially rabid response from conservatives.

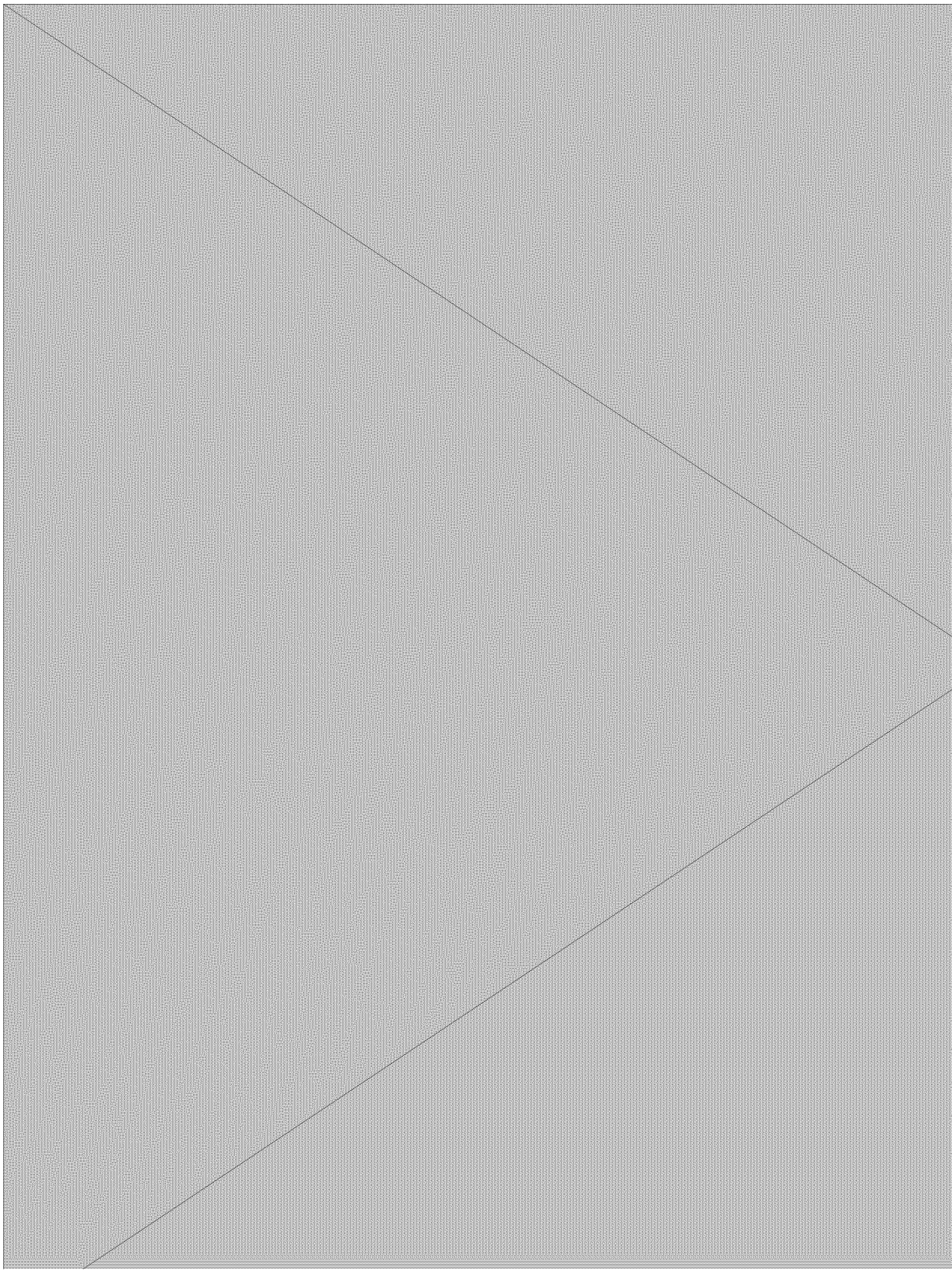
To many locals, all of these hits tangled together archaeological preservation, environmentalism and federal encroachment into their homeland. They tended to take their resentment out on the most vulnerable target: archaeological sites. Looting as a political act and anti-federal protest intensified during the 1980s, and has flared up whenever the environmentalists score some incremental victory.

The result, says Hurst, is that short-term successes tend to become long-term setbacks, each one deepening the polarization and lessening the chances of winning over the "hearts and minds" of locals. "We were in such a panic to save this stuff that we took a short-cut approach to these victories," says Hurst, who wears the long and wispy goatee and dark-framed glasses of a revolutionary from another age. "Victories were always top-down. It fed right into the gut conservatism of the rural folks, not just in Utah, but across the West. These guys see themselves as the John Waynes of the American Frontier."



Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, joins San Juan County Commissioner Rebecca Benally and Gov. Gary Herbert at the Natural Bridges National Monument visitors center in southeast Utah in June to discuss the proposed Bears Ears Monument.

Scott G. Winterton/Deseret News



Shirley Clarke (far left), Notah Tahy and Maryleen Tahy, with Clarke's granddaughter (second from left), at the Bluff hearing. They oppose the national monument proposal for a variety of reasons.

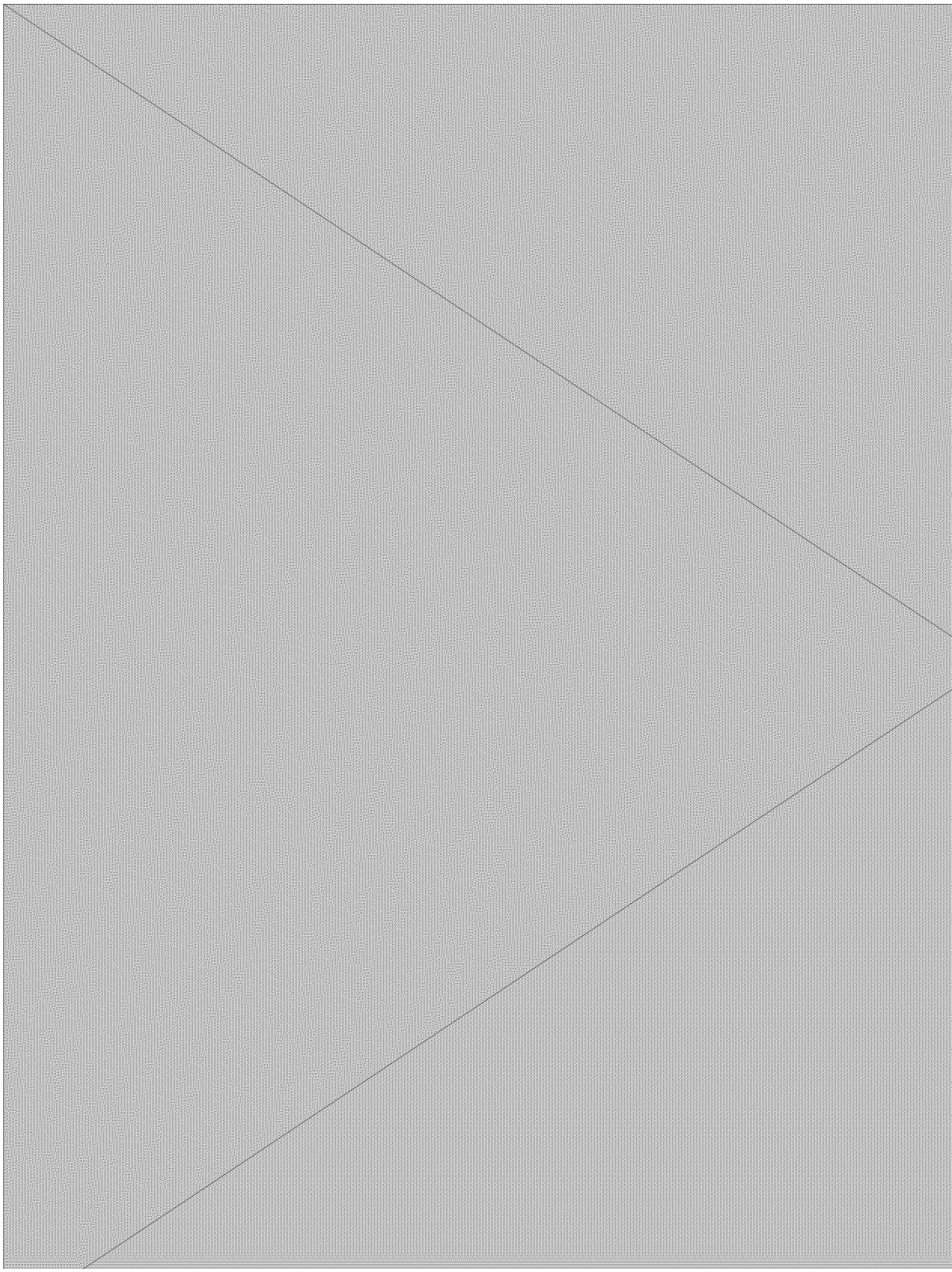
Jonathan Thompson

In 2010, Sen. Bob Bennett, a Utah Republican, stepped into the fray, hoping to broker a wilderness deal for the entire state that would have local support. The county-by-county-level effort would establish wilderness on the most pristine lands in exchange for various concessions — maybe land swaps that would allow for more development in urban areas or facilitate energy development for extraction-reliant counties. The ambitious goal? End the Utah land wars once and for all.

Bennett's conciliatory tone didn't fly so well in the venomous political climate that followed Obama's election, however, and he lost his 2010 primary to Tea Partier Mike Lee, now one of Utah's senators, pushing his deal-making into dormancy. But in 2013 Republican Rep. Rob Bishop brought it back to life, aiming to broker a "Grand Bargain" with what he called the Public Lands Initiative, or PLI, a congressional bill that would be forged county-by-county.

While the PLI covered all of Utah, San Juan County's process promised to be the most contentious and complex. At stake is a vast landscape, ecologically rich, home to tens of thousands of archaeological sites. One area, White Canyon, was designated as a "special tar sands area" by the Department of Energy several years ago, exploratory drill rigs have popped up here and there, and looting and vandalism continue. But the most pressing threat may be steadily increasing visitation without a corresponding uptick in management resources.

"For a long time, the strategy of protection was to keep it a secret," says Josh Ewing, executive director of the Bluff-based Friends of Cedar Mesa, but detailed descriptions of slot canyons and GPS coordinates of once-little-known sites have proliferated on the internet recently, forcing advocates to come up with a new tactic. It's a paradox that plagues every preservation effort: In order to protect the place, the advocates need to get public support. And to do that, they need to let the public know why the place is so special, to let the masses in on their secrets. The Pueblos, whose traditions demand secrecy regarding ceremonies and sacred places, are in an especially tight bind. To reveal too much is to increase visitation and open the door to pilgrimages to out-of-the-way holy sites by culture-appropriating, crystal-waving New Agers.



Josh Ewing, executive director of Friends of Cedar Mesa, inspects a petroglyph panel that was damaged when a looter attempted to saw and chisel it off last winter. “For a long time, the strategy of protection was to keep it a secret,” Ewing says. But with technology making it easy to find sacred sites, new strategies are needed.

JT Thomas

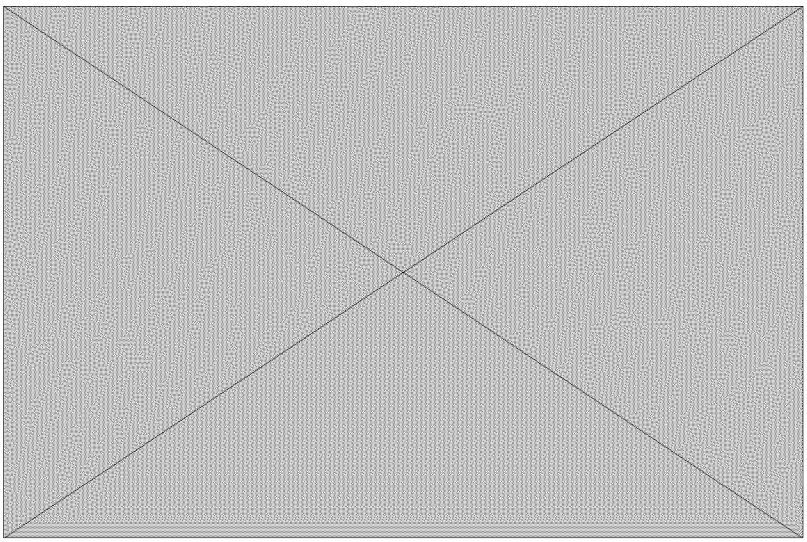
Ewing hoped that something better than the status quo would emerge from the PLI, despite the fact that the local lands council was chaired by a Sagebrush Rebel, Lyman. Ideally, it was the sort of “hearts and mind” and “organic” approach that Hurst strongly favors over top-down decision-making. Getting local buy-in would certainly make Ewing’s job easier than, say, a presidential monument designation, even if it included deep compromises. “We’re down here,” Ewing told me, only half-joking. “We’re the most likely to get shot if shooting begins.”

Mark Maryboy — Utah’s first Native American county commissioner and a longtime local politician and activist — represented Utah Diné Bikéyah, a conservation-minded group of local Navajos, on the lands council. Ewing went to bat for the rest of the local conservation community, providing a counterpoint to the local autonomist hardliners, the San Juan Alliance, which hoped to transfer all federal land — including national parks — over to the county and the state. (Canyonlands State Park, anyone?)

Yet after a handful of meetings, Utah Diné Bikéyah’s members became disillusioned. Their concerns were being ignored, and when other tribes tried to participate, they were rebuffed for not being “local.” The bad feelings deepened in 2014, when Lyman led an ATV protest ride down the closed section of Recapture Canyon, which is rich in ancient sites. “I was very offended,” Maryboy says. “I wonder how he’d feel if I went to the Blanding Cemetery and led a posse over their graves?”

So Bikéyah abandoned the PLI process and struck out on its own, quietly garnering endorsements from all seven of the Utah chapters of the Navajo Nation as well as the tribal government. The Ute Mountain Utes, based in Colorado but with reservation land in San Juan County, threw their weight behind the project. And in July 2015, the tribal coalition, with representatives from the Ute Mountain Ute and Uintah-Ouray Ute tribes, the Navajo Nation, Hopi and Zuni, was officially formed.

Their effort had evolved from simple environmental protection to a push for tribal sovereignty. It echoes the Indian natural resource self-determination battles of the 1970s, and is the next step in a more recent Sagebrush-type Rebellion in Indian Country that first flared up about a decade ago: A fight to have more say over what happens on ancestral homelands that were not included in the reservation.

- 

Tribes win one fight, lose another in pipeline protest

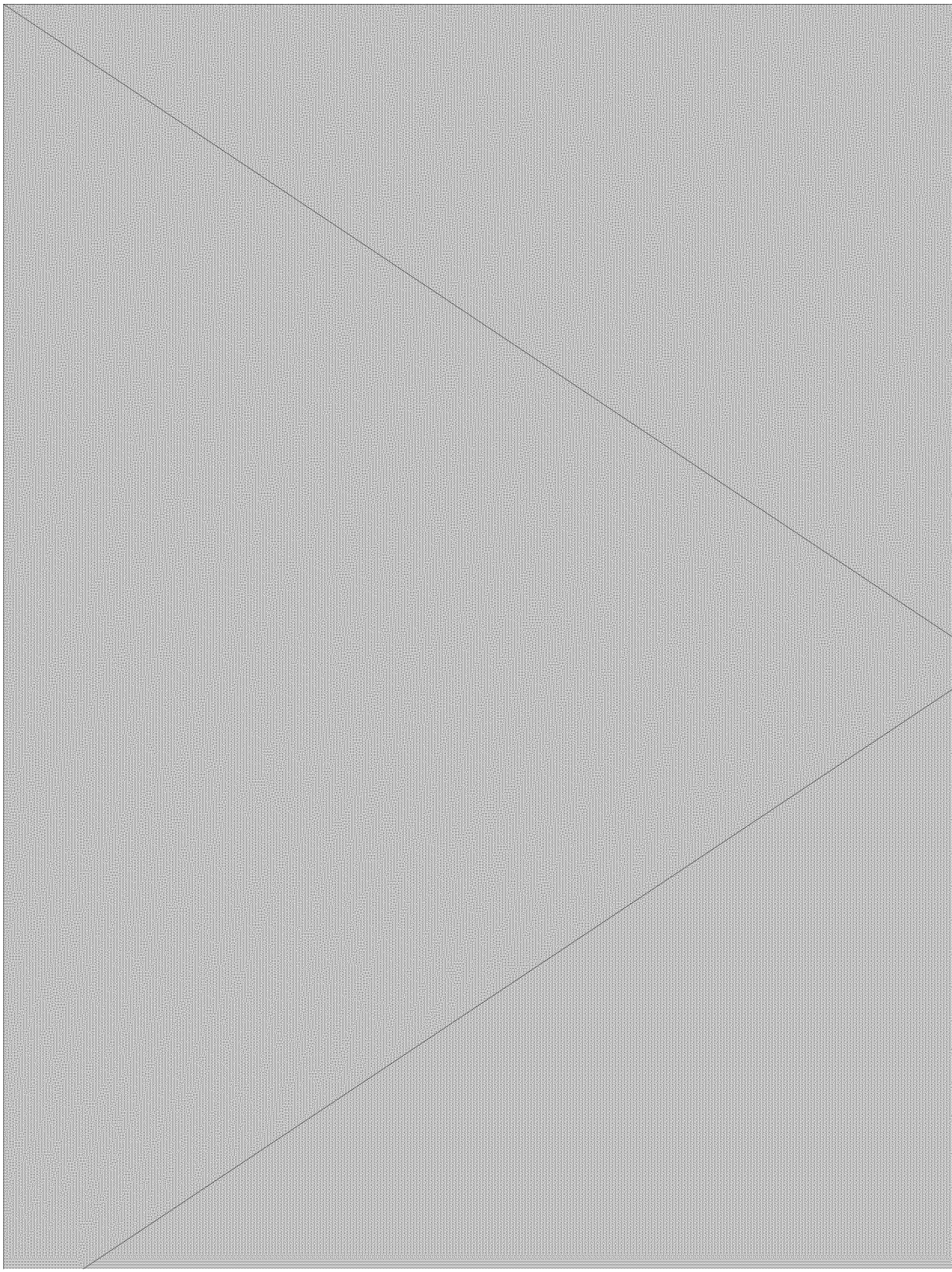
Read more

Under federal law, tribes must be consulted with over actions on federal lands, but the consultations rarely significantly alter or stop development. So tribes have increasingly banded together to wage more potent protests: At Oak Flats, in Arizona, to support an Apache effort to stop a proposed copper mine; on the sacred San Francisco Peaks in northern Arizona, in opposition to the use of effluent for snowmaking; and on the greater Chaco landscape in northwestern New Mexico, where oil and gas development runs roughshod over cultural sites. This summer, in the most visible and contentious uprising to date, hundreds of tribes joined the Standing Rock Sioux in a determined effort to stop an oil pipeline from burrowing through ancestral lands in North Dakota.

The Bears Ears proposal — formally unveiled in Washington, D.C., last October — takes the concept a step further by proactively putting tribes in control of land their ancestors called home. A monument manager would be overseen by a commission, made up of one representative from each of the five tribes, and one each from the U.S. Forest Service, BLM and National Park Service. The tribes, collectively, would have the loudest voice in decision-making. Neither the state of Utah nor San Juan County, in the meantime, would have anyone at the table.

More than 700 archaeologists, 25 tribal governments and the National Congress of American Indians, along with several local and national environmental and faith-based groups, have endorsed the proposal. “It’s a big healing process for Native Americans,” Maryboy told me last October in Bluff, as morning light illuminated Twin Rocks — a symbol of the Navajo monster-slaying brothers. “The colonization has been ugly. Protection of this land begins a healing process.”

Here in San Juan County, though, the healing has yet to begin. Instead, this fight has torn open old scars, and inflicted a few of its own.



Mark Maryboy, Utah's first Native American county commissioner and a longtime local politician and activist, helped build the coalition that proposed the Bears Ears National Monument. "The colonization has been ugly. Protection of this land begins a healing process," he says.

JT Thomas

Back at the Bluff hearing, those wounds fester in the stifling heat. Earlier in the year, fliers announcing "open season" on Colorado backpackers appeared nearby. And local Facebook posts about the monument have become infested with extremist rhetoric about the "BLM and FBI SS troops," calling Obama a "despot" and comparing the use of the Antiquities Act to Hitler's atrocities.

While I don't hear such language here, and the Bundy brothers and their Gadsden flag-waving, gun-toting acolytes are conspicuously absent, the tension is palpable. In the hearing, several pro-monument speakers are booed. Outside, anti-monument folks confront blue shirts, sometimes civilly, sometimes with hostility.

That Utes and Navajos are among those doing the confronting clearly catches some of the blue shirts — naively expecting all Native Americans to be their allies — off-guard. When it was still trying to work within the PLI framework, Utah Diné Bikéyah had almost unanimous support from local Navajos, getting endorsements from all seven Utah chapters. But once the inter-tribal coalition was formed and it became clear that it would seek a presidential order, some local Navajos and Utes rebelled, with current San Juan County Commissioner Rebecca Benally leading the charge.

This resistance serves as a potent PR tool for the opposition, particularly the Sutherland Institute, a conservative Salt Lake City think tank with clear religious leanings (its board chairman runs the GFC — God, Family, Country — Foundation). It produced a couple of slick videos, starring mostly local Navajos, claiming that a monument would rob locals of "lives and livelihoods." Sutherland's efforts have helped give the impression that all local Native Americans are opposed to the monument. In fact, only one chapter, Aneth, has officially rescinded its earlier support.

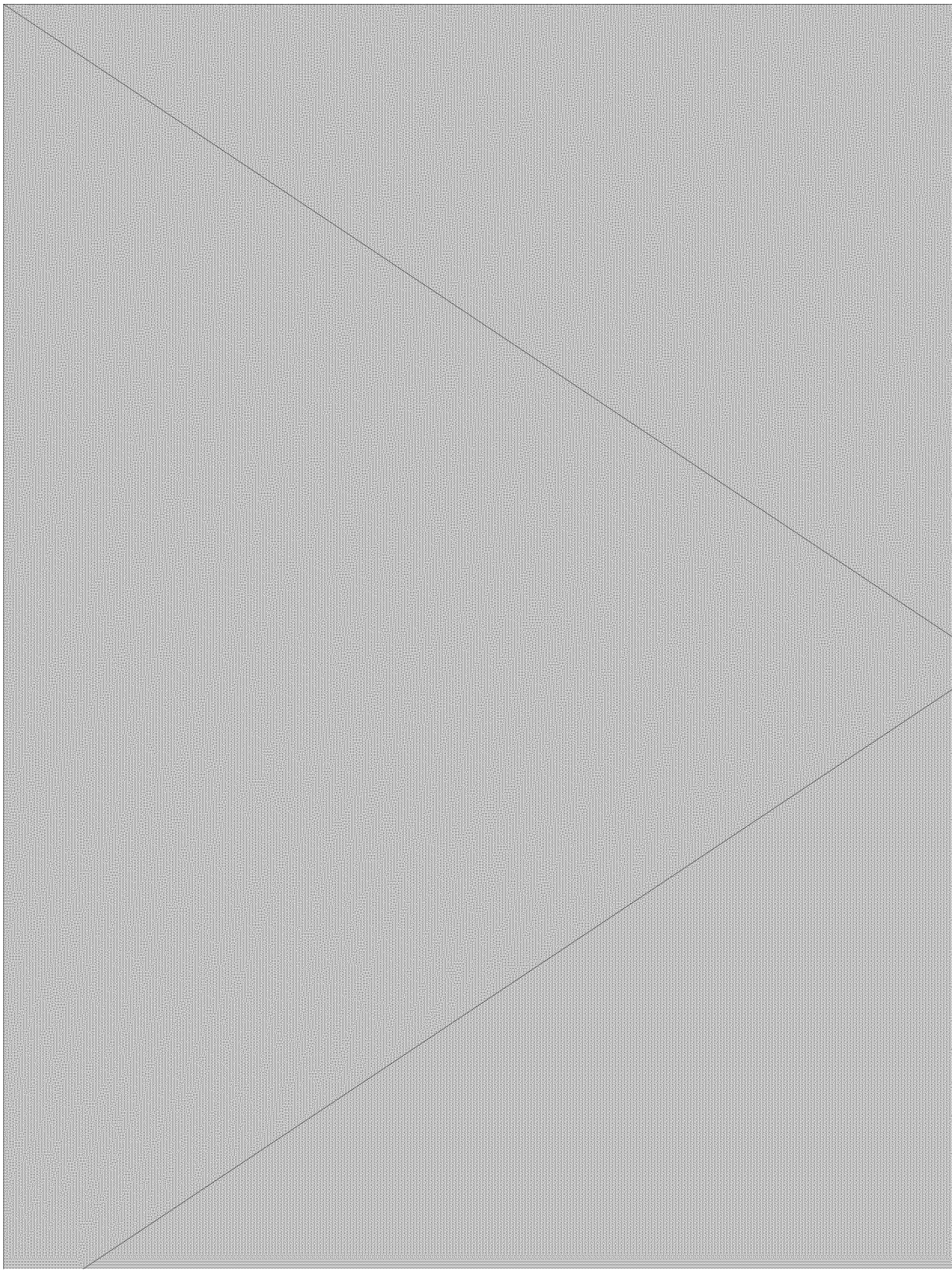
Still, those who do oppose the monument are passionate about it. Notah Tahy, wearing a wide-brimmed straw cowboy hat and a formidable turquoise bolo tie, tells me a monument would make life harder for the already beleaguered Navajos living on the reservation. "A lot of our medicine men get their herbs from there. And others pick piñon nuts," he says. "Some pick enough to make a little bit of a living." Turn it into a monument and next thing you know, he says, they're charging everyone $30 to get in, "like the Grand Canyon." Others worry that a monument would bring paved roads and RV-jammed parking lots to the backcountry and turn Blanding into another Moab, overrun by industrial recreation, housing crunches, crappy-paying service jobs and Saturday afternoon traffic jams.

But the primary driver of opposition, among Navajos and Utes as among whites, is the ideology of local autonomy — they don't want "outsiders" meddling in their backyards, threatening their freedom to access or to build an economy off public lands. Benally, elected in 2014, has allied herself with fellow commissioners Lyman and Bruce Adams, particularly on this issue. In April, she told state legislators that local monument supporters are mere pawns of "deep-pocketed groups outside of San Juan County who don't even know where Bears Ears butte is."

Maryleen Tahy, Notah's wife and a member of the LDS Church, tells me that about 30 percent of the local Navajos are also Mormons. Many of them are married to descendants of the Hole-in-the-Rock pioneers, and the local-control creed is embedded in their psyches. That they'd favor the ideology of their church, social or family "tribe" over that of their federal or tribal government is hardly surprising.

For the most part, adherents of this ideology prefer the PLI over a monument designation because, as one commenter pointed out at Bluff, "We prefer to have things done with us, not to us." But the bill that Bishop and Rep. Jason Chaffetz had unveiled just a couple of days earlier didn't much resemble the proposals hammered out by the counties. Instead, it was a "step backward," says Ewing, and utterly untenable. (Even Lyman has come out against the PLI, though for different reasons.) It would reopen fragile lands to motorized vehicles and grazing. It would create a Bears Ears National Conservation Area, but the 10-member advisory committee would include just one tribal representative. And the bill would give the state permitting authority for energy development on several tracts of federal land across Utah, a gift to oil and gas drillers. "Instead of resolving conflict, which it was intended to do, it sets up more," says Ewing. "I guess they (Bishop and Chaffetz) figured it would be better to throw out the political red meat and get re-elected than to do the hard work of compromise."

Hurst, the local archaeologist, seems at a bit of a loss. He remains convinced that the only way to save what's left of the archaeology here has to come from the locals, rather than a presidential decree. Yet the best hope for this sort of organic process to succeed, the PLI, has been tainted by still more top-down political machinations. National parks and monuments "feel like theme parks that have an artificial stasis imposed upon them," he says. "They feel dead. But then, the alternative is to loose the dogs of war on their ATVs and let them have at it. That's just as distasteful."



City center of Montezuma Creek, Utah, a Navajo town near the edge of the proposed Bears Ears National Monument.

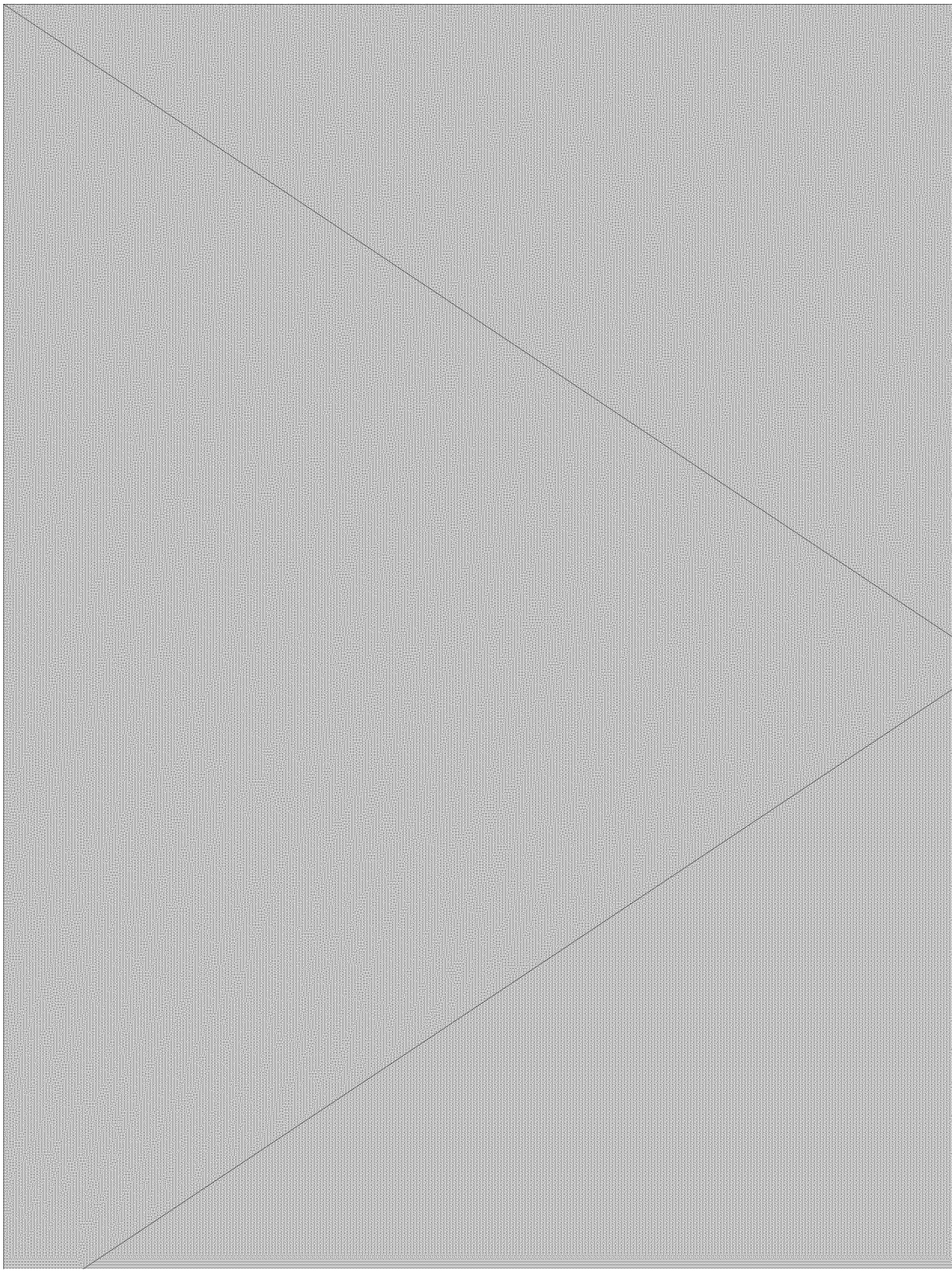
JT Thomas

As I chat amiably with the Tahys in the shade of a big tree in Bluff, a big white motor coach, coming from Durango or maybe even Las Cruces, pulls into a nearby parking lot, and a group of blue-shirted folks pile out. Soon after, a slim woman in a brown shirt approaches our shady spot with her fists and face bunched up. “I just asked them if they know where the Bears Ears are,” she says with a bit of disgust, motioning toward the bus. “Most of them didn’t.”

She looks toward me. I can tell she’s carefully considering asking me the same question. If she does, my reply won’t have anything to do with geography, it will involve place and the way it shapes people. I will tell her that, according to one bawdy, bloody version of the Navajo Creation Story, the Bears Ears are the top of the dismembered head of Changing Bear Woman, to whom Coyote gave magical powers by seducing, and how it remains a place to send the mentally ill for healing. I’ll tell her about the time my father came tumbling off the top of the east Bears Ear at 3 a.m., narrowly escaping the lightning bombarding his camping spot. I’ll tell her that I got married in that alfalfa field over yonder in the luminous aftermath of a September dust storm. And about the time two buddies and I drove down the Hole-in-the-Rock trail in December, backpacked into a canyon, and woke up three mornings later under a foot of snow, forcing us to walk miles through thigh-deep drifts. And how I’ll always be grateful to the folks at the Blanding hotel who revived us with enchiladas, despite the fact that we looked like Hayduke-loving hippies, because that’s just how people are around here.

Stories like these make this place home. It’s home to Zunis and Hopis, even the ones who have never seen or heard of the Bears Ears, because stories written upon this landscape over centuries course through their veins. Indeed, it’s home to all of us because just as Brooke Lyman pointed out, the public lands in San Juan County *are* America, inasmuch as they are a critical part of America’s story.

Hurst may be right about national monuments. Maybe they do fall short of their preservation goals, maybe they even suck the life from the places they’re meant to protect. But maybe this particular monument isn’t about preservation so much as it is about justice and freedom, about giving the most deeply rooted Americans some say over the landscapes that shaped them. More importantly, it gives them the freedom to tell their own stories of that landscape in their own ways, given just as much weight as conventional science and archaeology. “The world is full of multiple knowledges, and Bears Ears is another opportunity to celebrate that,” Enote says. “We should have a national monument, not just because it’s the ethical thing, but because it makes sense.”



A prehistoric granary overlooks Cedar Mesa in Utah, part of the proposed Bears Ears National Monument.

Josh Ewing/Courtesy Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition

This story is featured in an upcoming package in our printed magazine that includes additional reporting exclusive to subscribers. Subscribe now to get the full package upon its release.

High Country News *contributing editor Jonathan Thompson is a longtime resident of the Four Corners.* Follow @jonnypeace

This coverage is supported by contributors to the High Country News Enterprise Journalism Fund.